

AN *Ans. 3.*
ESSAY
ON THE
NATURE and USE
OF
MIRACLES:

Design'd against the Assertion,
That they are no proper Proof of a
DIVINE MISSION.

To which is prefix'd,
An ANSWER to some other Objections
against REVELED RELIGION contain'd
in a late Book, intitl'd,

Christianity as old as the Creation.

By JOSEPH HALLET, junior. *K*

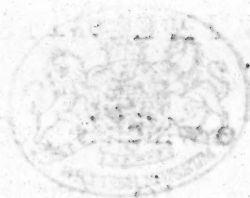
L O N D O N:

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NATURAL USE

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R E V E L E D R E L I G I O N ,

Contain'd in a late Book intitl'd,

Christianity as old as the Creation.

IT is needless to go through the whole Book, which I now propose to examin, because there are many *repetitions* in it, and because many things, which the Author of it delivers, are, I am sorry to say it, too true, and impossible to be confuted. The *ill Lives* of some professors of Christianity, the *Persecutions* which they have carried on, the *false Doctrines* they have blended with the Truths of the Gospel, &c. have given too great a handle to Unbelievers to reproach Religion on their account. But as Religion never taught them those false Doctrines, and evil Practices, it is not at all accountable
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for them ; nor does a Defense of *Revelation* oblige me to enter upon a defense of *them*. I shall therefore pass over all that part of the Book, which relates to the points now mentioned, and confine myself to the Consideration of those things, which have been advanced in it, that may seem to be Objections against the Gospel itself. These things are very few (but often repeated) and easily answer'd.

The first Error that I shall take notice of in the Book I am examining is, That *Natural Religion is not capable of any Addition*. The Author's own words, *p. 3.* are, " Natural Religion is perfect, since it came from a Being " of infinite Wisdom, and Perfection ; and " therefore it cannot admit of any Alteration, " or be capable of Addition, or Diminution." By this the Author designs to persuade us, that there can be no positive Institutions in any true, divine Religion, nor any thing at all beyond what mere natural Religion dictates to us. But the fallacy of this Reasoning will easily appear, if we consider what *Natural Religion* is, and why it is so call'd. *Natural Religion*, or the *Religion of Nature*, is that Religion which is calculated for a *State of Nature*, and adapted to it. But a State of Nature is a State of *Innocence*, and *Perfection*. From this State of Nature we are fallen into an *unnatural* State of *Vice*, and *Sin*. The proving then that Natural Religion was fully sufficient for a State of Nature, will not prove that it is sufficient for us in an unnatural State of Apostasy. When our

Author

Author says, *Natural Religion is perfect*, I suppose he means, it is fully sufficient in all respects to direct Men in their Duty, and in the Way to Happiness. Now if it were granted, that it was thus perfect in Man's Natural State of Innocence, and that Man did not in that State need any more Precepts than those which his own Reason would dictate to him as the Commands of God; yet when Men became sinful Creatures, the Questions would naturally arise in their minds, Whether God would not think fit to punish them according to their Deserts; and whether he would accept them to favour without some other testimony of his holiness, besides his obliging them to repentance? If God should see fit to require something besides Repentance, he must himself signify to Men what it is, and so must necessarily, in point of Wisdom, make an addition to the Law of Nature. It is true the Law of Nature *came from a Being of infinite Wisdom*: and accordingly it was perfectly suited to the primitive State of Nature. And as it came from infinite Wisdom, and withal results from the Nature of things, it cannot possibly be *abolish'd*. Accordingly it is, and ever will be, in full force. Yet when the State of the Creature, who is to be govern'd, is alter'd, there is a necessity, in point of Wisdom, that there should be an answerable addition made to the Law. As Men, after their Apostasy, still retain their old Natural Relations to God, as his Creatures, and Subjects, and to one another, as indigent creatures needing each

other's help in order to their happiness, and capable of promoting it, the Duties necessarily arising from these natural Relations and Circumstances, must in every State be equally incumbent upon Men. And as these Relations can never be destroy'd, it is impossible, that Men should ever be allow'd to act inconsistently with them. Yet when Men enter into a new Relation, they may, nay they must, be obliged to some new duties resulting from their new Relation. Men now stand to God in the Relation not only of Creatures, and Subjects, but of *Rebels* too. As Rebels they are *naturally* obliged to make *Satisfaction* to their Prince, that is, to do something for him, which shall repair the injury, and dishonour they have done him by rebelling against him, or else to suffer the Punishment which his Law denounced against Rebels. If they would escape the one, they are *naturally* obliged to do the other. If the Prince will exempt them from both, it must be intirely in him to determine upon what terms he will restore them to his Favour. Indeed, if they knew all things as their Prince does, they could certainly determine from their own View of things, what the Conditions would be; and for these would be justly enough look'd upon as dictated by the Law of Nature. But forasmuch as we Rebels against God know very little of the Universe more than nothing, we cannot say what the Conditions are upon which it is wisest and best for him to receive us to favour. Here then it is necessary that God should interpose by

a Revelation. This does not ~~change~~ the Law of Nature, but only adds a few *new* Precepts, suited to the *New* State whereinto we are fall'n. Here is not the least *change* in God. The change is in us. And as, in our State of Nature, it was wisest for God to give us Natural Religion for a complete Rule; so in our present corrupt State of Rebellion, it is wisest to give us such further Rules and Directions as are necessary in this new State, that we may still have a *perfect* Rule. In a State of Nature it was sufficient for God to require Men by the Law of Nature to love himself and one another. But in the present unnatural State of Apostasy, it is farther necessary, that God should direct us to the use of some *means*, which will *help* us to return from Sin to the Practice of Virtue. One of these means is a written standing Revelation, by the help of which Men arrive at a knowledge of necessary Truth, and of the Rules of Morality with much greater ease than they could do without it in their present corrupt State.

This very thing is granted by our Author, p. 195. where he says, "If God created Mankind to make them happy here, or hereafter, the Rules he gave them must be sufficient to answer that purpose: and consequently had Mankind observed them, there could have been no occasion for external Revelation: and its great Use now is to make Men observe those neglected Rules."

Another addition necessary to be now made to the Law of Nature, is the Promise of a Re-

ward in a future State. In a Natural State of innocence Men might have well enough assured themselves, that if they retain'd their Innocence and Perfection for ever, God would preserve them for ever in Life and Happiness. But after our Apostasy, we cannot but judge ourselves unworthy of eternal Life, and therefore cannot *naturally* conclude, that we shall be favour'd with it. And as we find by experience, that all Men are cut off from that eternal Life, which innocent Men might have expected to enjoy; as all Men die; we need something over and above the Light of Nature to assure us, that we shall be brought to Life again after Death, and that we shall be delivered from the Punishment which Sin deserves. But I shall add no more on this Head, because I have treated largely on it in my Discourse of *the impossibility of proving a future State by the Light of Nature*.

If the Apostasy of Men has made the interposition of a *Mediator* necessary, our Author must own, that an addition, relating to the Duties we owe to him, must be made to the Law of Nature. If the Son of God did come down from Heaven, dwell in a human body, suffer and die for us, it is fit we should be required to honour, reverence, and love him. And if he did really rise from the dead, and was thereupon exalted to be head over all things, our Author will acknowledge, I doubt not, that then it is fit the Son of God should be believed in, worship'd, and obey'd, according to the Authority which is supposed to be given to him. And then, when God has required us to
pay

pay these Duties to the Mediator, we are obliged to practice them, which, before the Appearance of the Mediator in flesh, no Man was obliged to do.

Perhaps our Author will here say, That the now mentioned Duties (supposing the Gospel-doctrine concerning Jesus to be true) are no addition to the Law of Nature; but, as he speaks in another case, *p. 69. A Superstructure that belongs to the Law of Nature; or, in other words, what the Reason, or Nature of the things themselves plainly point out to us.* About this I will not at all contend. It is very certain, that when we are well assured, that Jesus is the Son of God; that he really stands in the Relation of a Mediator between God, and Men; and that he bears to us the Relations of a Redeemer, a Prophet, a King, an Intercessor, &c. we might immediately conclude, that it is the Will of God we should honour his Son in all those Relations, and pay him all those Duties, which necessarily result from the Relations wherein He and Mankind stand to each other. If then all the Duties we owe to the Mediator are to be consider'd as in-join'd upon us by the Law of Nature, there can arise no Objection against Christianity from the consideration of the duties which it requires Men to pay to the Mediator. Tho' in this instance Christianity would not be *as old as the Creation*, because the Nature and Offices of the Mediator were not reveled as long ago as the Creation: yet, upon the supposition we have now made, and in the case we now speak of, Christianity makes

no addition to the Law of Nature ; and then all that our Author says about the impossibility of making additions to the Law of Nature makes nothing against Christianity.

On the other hand, if any had rather say, that the Precepts which require us to love, reverence, worship, obey, and trust the Mediator, are not Precepts of the Law of Nature, it will make no difference as to Christianity. For still every one will grant, that if Jesus be the Mediator, it is fit that God should command us to regard him as such. And if the Commands relating to him should be thought additions to the Law of Nature, no one can think, that it is unwise, or unfit for God to make such an addition as this to the Law of Nature.

Let us farther consider the Ceremonies of the Christian Religion, and whether it is possible that a God of infinite Wisdom should appoint them. Now as to these, I desire the Reader to take notice, that I shall speak of no Ceremonies, and positive Institutions but such as have been really appointed by the Authority of God. I speak of the Lord's Day, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, &c. Against these positive Institutions of the Religion, I suppose, is level'd all that this Author says, and often repeats about things *indifferent*, and God's not being an *arbitrary* Being. He says, p. 61. " If God is an arbitrary Being, and " can command things merely from Will, and " Pleasure——there is nothing to hinder him " from perpetually changing his mind." This is very true, but nothing to the case in hand. We

have

all have no apprehension, that God is an *arbitrary* Being in the sense here intended. We are fully assured, that he does not, and cannot command things merely from Will and Pleasure, without Cause and without Reason. We are sure God always acts upon the principles of the strictest Reason, and highest Wisdom. There is in nature a good and substantial Reason for every Command which God has given us in the Gospel. His *Wisdom* led him to appoint every Institution of the Christian Religion. If any one of these Institutions had been omitted, the Religion would not have been as well and wisely constituted as it is now. This we can demonstrably infer from the Wisdom of God, upon the supposition, that the Gospel came from God. Yet at the same time, we may not be able as completely to discover the reason of a particular Institution as we would wish to do. It is very plain, that our not knowing the particular Reason of a divine Institution is very far from proving, that there is no reason for it at all. For a God of infinite knowledge may see sufficient Reasons, where our short sight cannot discover any. The positive Institutions then of the Christian Religion are no objections to the Divinity of this Religion. Nay, it is no objection to any divine Religion, that there are Ceremonies appointed by it, the particular reason of each of which we cannot discover. If the Religion is proved to be appointed by God, the infinite Wisdom of its Author will satisfy us, that every Command and Institution of it is rational and fit.

As to the Institutions of the Christian Religion in particular, we can easily see that they are wisely appointed, not only in general because they are appointed by a wise God, but also as we can discern the particular Reason and Use of each of them.

The Author, whose Work I am now examining, seems to be of an Opinion, that God himself cannot, but that Men must, determine concerning the *means* that conduce to Virtue and Happiness. His words are, *p.* 115. " God does
" not act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily ;
" but leaves those things, that can only be con-
" sidered as Means (and as such are in their own
" nature mutable) to human discretion, to de-
" termine as it thinks most conducing to those
" things which are in their own nature obli-
" gatory." The things in their own nature obligatory in the Christian Religion, are all the Moral Precepts of it, which require the Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour. Our Author grants, that there may be other things, which may be *Means conducing* to the practice of this Morality. Concerning these *Means*, the question is, Whether it is possible for God to appoint any such? Our Author thinks, he cannot ; because if he should, he would *act arbitrarily, and interpose unnecessarily* : Whereas one should rather imagin, that he would not herein act arbitrarily, and interpose unnecessarily, for this very reason, because the things spoken of are acknowledged to be *Means conducing to those things, which are in their own nature*

obligatory. Their being Means conducing to this great End is acknowledged to be a Reason why *human Discretion may determine them.* The same then cannot but be a good Reason why God should determine them. If these Means *really* conduce to this good End, God cannot but know that they do so, and that much better and more certainly than Men can do. If then the little Wisdom that men have is allowed to be sufficient to choose means that conduce to their improvement in Virtue; is not the Wisdom of God infinitely better qualified to make the choice for us? Let us apply this to the instance of the Lord's Supper. Our Author seems to grant, in the words last cited from him, that human Discretion might appoint such an Ordinance in remembrance of Christ, provided it was thought by *men* to conduce to the promoting of Virtue. If men might, with this view agree to feast together in remembrance of Christ, and then, for the sake of their improving in Virtue, view his Example, remember his Love, review their Obligations to him, devote themselves to obey and imitate him, and pray for his help: I say, if men might voluntarily agree to do these things as means conducing to Virtue, it is plainly most unreasonable to deny, that God might appoint the same means. As the Lord's Supper is really a mean of promoting Virtue, God could better discover it to be so than men. If it be a mean of promoting Virtue, it is fit, that it should be appointed. And if men, of their own heads did not happen to think of this Mean, was it any way unfit, that God should

shew it to them, and order them to use this as a mean conducing to Virtue? It seems very surprising to me, that this Author should allow human Discretion to be capable of discovering and appointing Means of Virtue, while he denies that God can appoint such means. For surely God is infinitely better qualified to do it than men. And as some things are allowed to be *means of Virtue*, it is in the Nature of things fit they should be appointed: so that God is infinitely far from *acting arbitrarily*, when he appoints such means of Virtue. Nor does he herein *interpose unnecessarily*, since *human Discretion* is very weak and short-sighted, and not fit to be trusted very far. It best acts up to it's own Character, when it concludes that God's Wisdom is infinitely greater, and so pays an absolute submission to the Dictates of it. There is great need for God to interpose and to direct us as to the most proper means and helps of Virtue, and the Use of them. When God does thus interpose, he discovers his Wisdom, and his Love to us, and therein acts like himself.

The Law of Nature requires *Social Worship*, and directs that some time should be fix'd for it. Can any one persuade himself, that it is not as fit for God to fix the time for men, as for men to fix it for themselves? If men should voluntarily agree to meet together for the public Worship of God every week, on the first day of it, our Author would allow that their discretion might determine this, provided they thought it most conducing to Virtue to do so. What can

be the reason then, why God himself may not do the same? Does not he as certainly know, whether this conduces to Virtue? Or would it be any thing arbitrary and unreasonable in him to direct them to do that which conduces to the promotion of Virtue?

I shall not apply the same Consideration to the other means of Virtue appointed in the Gospel. The Specimen here given is sufficient for my present purpose.

Concerning all these Means of Virtue appointed in the Christian Religion, it is to be observed, that those of them, which are peculiar to the Christian Religion, have a manifest Relation to Christ, the Author of it. It is common both to the Jewish and Christian Religion to set apart *one day in seven* for public Worship: but in the Christian Religion the taking the *first* day of the Week, because Christ thereon rose from the dead, and the giving it the Name of, *The Lord's day*, shew that it has a Relation to Christ, and that therein we are particularly to think of his Resurrection. Baptism has a relation to the Mediator, as it is a Sign of admitting Persons into his Church, that they may obtain Salvation thro' him, thro' whom alone it can be obtain'd. The Lord's Supper is appointed in remembrance of what Christ has done and suffer'd to obtain Salvation for us. The Use that I would make of this Observation is this, That there may be very great reason for these Institutions in the Religion of the *Mediator*, tho' there was not any reason for them in the Religion of *innocent* Na-

Nature. As certain as it is, that we have sinned so certain it is, that we stand in need of a Mediator: as certain as it is, that Jesus is the Mediator between God and us, so certain it is, that it is fit and reasonable we should be obliged to remember him with the most devout Affections: and as certain as it is, that it is fit we should in this manner remember him; so certain it is, that God must know this fitness, and be able to point it out to us, and that he would not herein either act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily.

This Author adds, *p.* 122. “ Whatsoever is in
“ itself indifferent, whether as to Matter, or
“ Manner, must be so to an alwise Being
“ who judges of things as they are, and for the
“ same reason that he commands things which
“ are good, and forbids those which are evil, he
“ leaves Men at liberty in all things *indifferent*.
This passage, as it is thus generally expressed, is
very true. But as it is design’d to be applied to
the Institutions of the Christian Religion, the
Author would thereby insinuate something that
is false. It is undoubted that God *judges of all*
things as they are. But God does not always
judge them to be what we are apt to think they
are. Those things, which *we* call *indifferent*
are not such in the opinion of God. We call
them *indifferent*, when we are not able to discern,
that they are good, or evil. But where our short
sight fails us, God discerns the good or evil of
them. Every Action we do, necessarily tends to do
service, or to do hurt. An Action which Men call
indifferent, often does *this* hurt

when

When it does no other, that it, at the time of
 doing it, prevented our doing a better Action,
 which would have been more serviceable to the
 World, or to ourselves. When *we* do not fore-
 see the Consequences of an Action, and are not
 aware what influence it will have upon the Hap-
 piness of Mankind, *we* call it, *indifferent*. But
 if *we* knew all things, as God does, we should
 immediately perceive, that every Action is either
 good, or evil, having a tendency either to do
 good, or hurt, in some kind, and degree, or
 other. If an Action tends to do good in any
 degree, an alwise God may fitly (nay certainly
 does by the Law of Nature, as soon as we per-
 ceive it's good tendency) command us to do it.
 Besides strict Virtues, there are such things as
 helps to Virtue, or *means* of Virtue. These are
 not *in themselves* indifferent things. And yet
 Man's discretion was not sufficient to determine,
 whether they were really means of Virtue, or
 not; and so look'd upon them as indifferent
 things. But as God saw them to be helps to
 Virtue, it was fit, he should appoint them: and
 Men must be obliged to take God's Judgement,
 and to make use of those means of Virtue,
 which he is pleased to appoint, and recommend.
 We call our natural Relations to God, and to one ano-
 ther, will not immediately discover the necessity
 of the positive Institutions of the Christian Re-
 ligion; yet the necessity of them may be learned
 from God's having appointed them. And since
 God saw they were means conducive to engage
 men in performing the Duties that result from
 their

their Natural Relations to God, and to one another, he was very far from *acting tyrannically*, when he appointed them.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not (as this Author would represent them) things in their own Nature indifferent, and afterwards made necessary by the arbitrary Will of God, but God appointed them, because he saw they had a tendency to promote the Good and Welfare of Mankind. If they had been things which could have been of no Service, an Alwise God would not have commanded us to receive them.

Another great Error into which I apprehend our Author is fallen, is, That "where Texts may be taken in different senses, things are as much left to be determin'd by our Reason as if there were no such Texts." *p. 37.* The Author of this Saying, will, I suppose, immediately see his mistake, if he will apply this Saying to any other book besides the Bible. Let us apply it for instance to an Act of Parliament in which an expression is capable of being taken in two different Senses. Will our Author say in this case, that things are as much left to be determin'd by our Reason, as if there were no such Act? All that our Reason has to do in this case, is to judge which Sense of the Word was intended by the Legislature. We are not to consider, what the Legislature *should* have determin'd, but what it *has in fact* determin'd. The Case is the same in judging of a piece of history. Supposing an antient historian has expressed

o one exprefs'd himself so darkly, as that it was doubt-
 ful, and disputed, whether he meant, that *Cæsar*
 conquer'd *Pompey*, in one certain Battle, or
Pompey therein conquer'd *Cæsar*. What would
 be the Province of our Reason in this case?
 Surely not to *write*, or *invent* the piece of
 history, but only to seek the historian's mean-
 ing: and when we have found the historian's
 meaning, we should, if he is a credible historian,
 believe the fact upon His testimony. In like
 manner, when our Reason has discovered the
 meaning of a Text of Scripture, we believe that
 which is taught in the Text, upon the authority
 of the Revelation. Reason only teaches us the
meaning of the Text: but mere Reason with-
 out the Text, could not teach us the *doctrine*
 contain'd in that Text. The Text teaches us
 that *God created the world in six days*. A
 question is moved, whether the Text means six
common days, or six *years*, using the word *day*
 for a *year*? When Reason has done all it can,
 it can go no farther than the *interpretation of*
the Words of the Text. If we believe, that the
 text means *common days*, then our believing
 that God made the world in *six common days*
 is wholly built upon the *Authority* of the *Text*.
 Reason can say nothing in the case, whether it
 was made in Six or in Sixteen days. If we be-
 lieve, that the text means *years*; then our be-
 lieving that God made the world in *six years*,
 is *wholly* built also upon the Authority of the
 text. Reason cannot say, whether the world
 was made in an instant, in one year, in six, or

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in any other space of Time whatsoever. So when the text says, that Jesus is *the Son of God*, in whatever sense we understand the expression, we believe the doctrine merely upon the Authority of the Revelation. If there was no text which taught this Doctrine, our Reason could know nothing about it. But now it is revealed, we are obliged to inquire after the true sense of the Text, and then to believe it. And then, I am sure, we are not *as much left to be determin'd by our Reason, as if there were no such Texts.*

Another very great Mistake, which this Author has advanc'd, relates to the Doctrine of *Miracles*. He supposes, that Miracles are no proof of any Religion, because they may be perform'd by evil Beings. His words are, *p. 192.* " If Miracles can be perform'd by evil as well
" as by good Beings, the *worst* Religion may
" have the *most* miracles: and *p. 200.* God in
" the Old testament is said to suffer Miracles to
" be done by *false* Prophets (*Deut. xiii. 1,—3.*)
" in order to prove his people; and in the New,
" such Miracles as would, *if it were possible,*
" *deceive the very elect,* Matth. xxiv. 24."

Upon the occasion of these hints, which I am sensible have puzzled many, I beg leave to lay before the World the following *Essay on the Nature and Use of Miracles*. The Foundation of which Essay is undesignedly confirm'd by our Author himself, *p. 277.* " If God (says
" he) in the very frame, and make of those
" animals we term irrational, has implanted
" the

“ the Sense of every thing necessary to answer
 “ the end of their Creation : can we imagine,
 “ he has not as great a care of his creatures in-
 “ dow’d with Reason, and made after his own
 “ image, and for ends infinitely more noble than
 “ the brute-creation ? ” I add, Can it then be
 thought that God has left mankind without suf-
 ficient means of distinguishing between the true
 and false Religions, and between miracles done
 by his Order, and others done in opposition to
 his Truth ?



A N
E S S A Y
On the
N A T U R E *and* U S E
O F
M I R A C L E S.

IT is the Business and Duty of every Christian well to *understand* the Nature and Evidences of our holy Religion. Mens *ignorance* in these greatest Affairs of Life has betray'd them into Infidelity and Vice. And when they have taken up a Religion upon trust, and upon the mere authority of their Parents and other Teachers; the least difference or controversy among those Teachers about any points of Religion, has unsettled their minds, and brought them to doubt of the *whole* Religion. To avoid these evils, it is necessary men should see what grounds there are for their receiving the Doctrines of Christ, and of his Apostles, as the Doctrines of God, the Rule of their Duty, and the Foundation of their Hope. When mens faith is built upon *sufficient*

and *strong* foundations, they may well expect (what else they cannot reasonably look for) that it shall stand the shock of Temptations, both in a time of Peace, and in times of Persecution too.

In order to such a rational Faith it is necessary for us to consider the Evidence which is afforded to the Doctrines and Promises of the Gospel by the *Miracles* which were perform'd by *them* that taught it, particularly by our Blessed Savior the chief Preacher of it.

Concerning these Miracles it has been ask'd, Whether they can be perform'd by any Power less than the infinite Power of God? But the question is absolutely needless. No question can be *necessary* about Miracles, but what is capable of being answer'd by a plain unlearned observer of them. *A Miracle* must be a work which it is *not in the Power of Man to perform, by his own Natural Strength*. But it is of no consequence to Religion, to determine, whether it was perform'd *immediately* by God's own hand, or whether it was done by an inferior being, whom God order'd to perform it: as will soon be made to appear, in what follows.

It has been also ask'd, Whether Miracles *in themselves* are Proofs of the Truth of the Doctrine, which is taught by him that works the Miracles; or whether we must not consider the *Nature* of the Doctrine, before we can judge whether the Miracles are a sufficient proof of it?

The Answer to these Questions, and to every other Question relating to the Doctrine of Miracles, will be found in the following Chain of Propositions.

I.

I. There must in nature be an easy way for all mankind, both learned and *unlearned*, to judge of the pretensions of a Prophet. *True* Religion is design'd for the Instruction, Reformation and Benefit of *all sorts* of men. It was never intended for the *knowing* and *philosophic* part of the world *alone*; but indifferently for the use of *all*. Thus *Moses* spoke from God to *all the Jews*: and the Gospel was preached to the *poor* and *unlearned*, as well as to the rich and wise, *Matth.* xi. 25. The Gospel reveals such Doctrines as equally concern *all* mankind, and requires such virtues as are the common duties of *all* men, which the unlearned are as much oblig'd to know and practise, as the greatest Philosophers. And since God intended his Religion indifferently for the use of *all* mankind, we may certainly conclude, that he has given the world such evidences of the truth of this Religion as the *unlearned* may be able to perceive, without running into those nice Inquiries, and metaphysical Controversies as are sometimes mix'd with the Argument. We may certainly learn from the Wisdom, Goodness, and Holiness of God, that as he design'd the Gospel to be the Rule of Life for the *unlearned*, and appointed it to be a mean of *their* Salvation, he has put it into *their* Power to make a certain Judgement about the Proofs whereby it is establish'd. If *they* were not capable of receiving Satisfaction in the case, they could not be obliged to receive the Gospel. For God cannot require men to believe without reason, or to submit to that as a *Divine Rule*, which

for which they *cannot possibly* discern to be of a divine original. Since then God does require *all*, both learned and *unlearned*, to receive the Gospel; it must be concluded, that he has given them sufficient evidence of its divine original, which a man may discern by the mere help of *common sense* and *impartial* examination.

II. It is certain, that God will never suffer sincere and impartial inquirers after the *true Religion* to be under a *necessity* of being deceived. Sometimes indeed God permits men to be deceived, and *gives them up to strong delusions to believe a lie*. But even these are not under a *necessity* of being deceived. It is *their own fault* that they are in an error. The reason of their error is, that they did not impartially search after the Truth. God is not chargeable with their Mistakes. When he reveals a Religion to the World by his Prophets, he takes care, that those Prophets shall give *plain* and *full* proof of their Mission, which cannot but satisfy every *honest* examiner. When a false Prophet rises with an attempt to seduce mankind from the true religion, God always provides an anti-*Rule*, which is fully sufficient to secure all impartial and upright men from the infection. That God always does, and ever will act in this manner, we may most certainly gather from his *moral* Perfections. A God of Truth never will, and never can, suffer a lying Prophet to establish his pretended Authority by such proofs as should *necessarily impose* upon *honest* men. And since he has made men's *belief* of the true religion

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necessary to Salvation, and their apostatising from it to a false religion a *destructive* sin; his infinite goodness and justice are a full security to us, that he will always put it into the power of every honest, impartial man to discern and avoid the error, and to perceive and embrace the truth. Accordingly the Scripture says, that it is *not possible for the elect*, that is, for honest and good men, to be *deceived* in an affair of such consequence, as the examination of the pretensions of a Prophet is, *Matth. xxiv. 24.*

This shews how very needless and weak it is for men to put such cases as imply the contrary. Some men by putting cases, which never can happen, without observing the impossibility of them, have greatly perplex'd their own, and others minds without any manner of reason. They have ask'd, *What should men do, if a false prophet should work more and greater miracles than a true prophet? or, What should they do if a false prophet should arise, and work miracles when no true prophet is raised up to oppose and confute his pretensions?* I must now beg leave to ask in my turn: Suppose that four and four should make thirteen in any time to come, what should we do with our old Rules of Arithmetic? What should we do, if the Devil should hereafter be stronger than God? or what should we do, if God should revele falsehoods and lies to the world? All these are cases that never did, and that never can happen. It is impossible for God to lie. It is impossible for the Devil to be as mighty as God. It is impossible that four and four should

ever make thirteen. And it is *as impossible*, that the holy and righteous Governor of the World should ever suffer a false Prophet to work *more* and *greater* miracles than a true Prophet; or to work miracles without raising a true Prophet to *oppose*, and *confute* his Pretensions; or without giving honest men the plainest evidences, in some *other* way, of the imposture. As long as God is infinitely wise, holy, and merciful, we are sure, he will always take care, that his own Prophets shall give full proof of their Divine Mission and Authority; and that false Prophets shall not be able to deceive the Elect, or to mislead those that honestly and impartially set themselves to discover the truth and will of God. If he cannot lie, he cannot suffer honest men to be necessarily led into error about the true religion.

III. It is certain God may, in some circumstances, permit false Prophets to work miracles. This he has actually done. The *Magicians* in *Egypt* perform'd *some* of the same miracles as *Moses* did. Some learned men, I know, have fancied, that the wonderful things done by the *Magicians* were not works of the same nature with those that were done by *Moses*. They take these to have been *real* miracles, the others *not*. But whatever difference men of thought and leisure may fancy they see in the case, it is evident, the bulk of the Spectators of those miracles could not but look upon the works done on both sides, as of the very *same nature* and *equally* *miraculous*. The poor Brickmakers (whose daily

task was too much, and too constant to afford them the least moment for the study of Philosophy) could not but think, that when the *Magicians* turn'd a *Rod into a Serpent*, they wrought as *real* a miracle as *Moses* when he turn'd *his Rod into a Serpent*. Their notion of Miracles could be no more than this, that the works were *above the power of men*, and were performed by the power of some invisible, superior Being, with a design to establish the authority of the man, for whose sake they were done, as a teacher of Religion. The works of the *Magicians* were as really above the power of men, as the works of *Moses*: and consequently in the judgement of men whose heads have not been turn'd by Schoolmen and Philosophy, were as much miracles as these.

In forming a judgement then concerning the Authority of *Moses*, the Brickmakers went upon the supposition, that there were *real miracles* wrought in opposition to him. And if they could not have established his Authority upon this supposition, they could not have established it at all. When the things done by two men, to all outward appearance, seem'd to be the same things, they could not but believe them to be the very same. As the men, who did them, acted in *opposition* to one another, the Spectators might well suppose, that they were assisted by *different Powers*. *Moses* might be help'd by *good Angels*; the *Magicians* by *evil* ones. But still *Moses* his three first miracles did not appear to need greater natural strength for the performance of

of the works themselves, than the miracles done by the invisible Power that assisted the *Magicians*.

The way then that the Brickmakers were obliged to take in answering the *Magicians* was not, by saying, that the works done by the *Magicians* were *not real* miracles (which indeed is what not only a poor Brickmaker, but even a Philosopher, cannot prove:) but they must have confuted the *Magicians* some other way, (as God soon inabled them easily to do) even while they adhered to their supposition, that their miracles were as real as those that were done by *Moses* himself. As God, at that time, permitted the *Magicians* in *Egypt* to work miracles, so our Savior, and St. *Paul* foretold the coming of other false Prophets, who should be able to work them. *False Christs*, (says our Savior, *Matth. xxiv. 24.*) *and false prophets shall arise, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.* And St. *Paul* said of the Man of Sin, that his *coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and miracles of a lie; i. e.* miracles perform'd with a design to seduce men to believe a lie. *2 Thess. ii. 9.* This expression, *Miracles of a Lie* must be explain'd, like those others that are parallel to it, *The Tree of Life, The Horn of Salvation, Justification of Life, &c.* As *The Tree of Life* signifies, *the Tree that causeth Life*; so *Miracles of a Lie*, or *Miracles of Error*, are Miracles which *cause* error, or which cause men to believe a lie. Again, St. *John* tells us, that the

Little Beast doth great miracles, and particularly causeth fire to come down from heaven upon earth in the sight of men, Rev. XIII. 13. He speaks of the *Spirits of Demons working miracles*, Ch. XVI. 14. and of a *false Prophet who works miracles in the sight of the Beast*, Ch. XIX. 20. From all these texts it is very plain, that God may, in some circumstances, permit false Prophets to work miracles. But still they shall not hereby *necessarily* deceive us. For,

IV. Whenever God does permit a false Prophet to work miracles, he always takes care to give sufficient evidence of his being a *false* Prophet, which shall satisfy every reasonable and impartial inquirer. The methods God takes to confute the Pretensions of such false Prophets as are permitted to work miracles, are these two, *viz. Foretelling the Appearance and Miracles of the false Prophet; or raising up a true Prophet at the same time* to oppose and confute him. There is no necessity God should always take both these methods at once: either of them alone being sufficient. Sometimes he takes one, sometimes the other.

I. Sometimes when God permits a false Prophet to work miracles, he before hand gives sufficient evidence of his being a false Prophet, by *foretelling his Appearance and Miracles*, and by warning those, whom he will attempt to seduce, not to believe in the Impostor. Thus our blessed Savior foretold the coming and miracles of *false Christs*, and of *false Prophets*. St. Paul foretold the coming and miracles of the *Man of*

Sin.

Sin. These Predictions of their coming, and warnings to avoid them were fully sufficient to justify any reasonable man in not hearkening to them.

It will be here ask'd, Why should we regard the testimony of Christ, and of St. *Paul* against the *Miracles* of the false Prophets? why should not the Miracles of the false Prophets persuade us to believe in them as much as the miracles of Christ persuade us to believe in him? If miracles are a good Proof of a divine Authority in the one case, why are they not allow'd to be so in the other? I answer: In the case now mention'd there is really a *contest* between two workers of miracles. He, that *conquers* and gains the victory over the other, will appear to be the *true* Prophet. The God of the true Prophet will not suffer the Power by which the false Prophets act, to do so many miracles, as shall give an impartial examiner any rational foundation to doubt, on which side the *victory* lies. He will never suffer the false Prophets to work as many and great miracles, as the true Prophet who foretold their coming, and who warn'd men against them, has done. For a wise, good, and faithful God cannot but always take care, that *honest* inquirers shall be able to distinguish between *important* Truth, and *dangerous* Error. The Proposition I am now establishing will at once receive light from, and give light to, that famous text, which has been often cited upon such occasions, but which, I think, has not been thoroughly understood, *Deut.* XIII. 1, 2, 3. " If " there

“ there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer
 “ of dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder,
 “ and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass,
 “ whereof he spake unto thee, saying, *Let us*
 “ *go after other Gods* (which thou hast not
 “ known) *and let us serve them*: Thou shalt
 “ not hearken unto the words of that Prophet,
 “ or that Dreamer of dreams.” *Moses* here puts
 a case, that a false Prophet might arise, and work
a miracle in order to seduce the Israelites to the
 worship of other Gods. But *Moses* does not
 suppose that this false Prophet would be able to
 work *as many*, and *as great* miracles as *Moses*
 himself did. *Moses* only speaks of the false
 Prophet’s giving *a Sign*, or *a Wonder*, i. e. *one*
single miracle, or so.

When such a false Prophet should arise, and
 work a miracle or two, there would be, properly
 speaking, *a direct opposition* between *Moses* and
 the false Prophet, *as* Prophets and workers of
 miracles, at what distance of time soever they
 should happen to live. Both work miracles. The
 Question is, Who is the true Prophet of the true
 God, and to whom of the two Contenders must
 we hearken? If both *Moses* and the false Prophet
 had wrought all the *same* miracles, a reasonable
 man must *necessarily* have been in doubt; and
 would have been led farther, even to question,
 whether there is any such thing at all as Truth
 in the World. If the false Prophet, who was
 foretold by *Moses*, did work *more* and *greater*
 miracles than *Moses*, every *reasonable* man ought,
 and, I am sure, the *bulk* of mankind *infallibly*
 would

would, believe him to be a *greater* Prophet than *Moses*, and to be employ'd by a Being superior to him, whose messenger *Moses* was. But God would take care, that his people should not be thus *necessarily* led into such a destructive error, as Idolatry most unquestionably is; or into a doubt in an affair of such vast importance as *true Religion* is. From whence we may certainly conclude, that a holy God would not suffer the false Prophet to work *greater* miracles than *Moses*, or as *great* and *many*. The true and faithful God would tie up the hands of the invisible Power by which the false Prophet acts and stop him *in season*, while there should be no room for a rational Doubt, and while the difference between *Moses*, and the false Prophet should be *so plain*, as that *every eye* might see it. When such a false Prophet should be permitted to arise, the people would have sufficient means of satisfying themselves, that he was indeed a false Prophet. Upon comparing his miracles with the miracles which were done by *Moses*, they would find that *Moses* had the superiority by *abundant* degrees. *Moses* wrought *innumerable* miracles: whereas the false Prophet was permitted to perform *only one or two*, which could not be compared with his. This Consideration alone would convince any reasonable man, that *Moses* was the true Prophet, and that the God whom he preach'd, was the true God. For the Israelites might assure themselves, that the Prophet, who opposed *Moses*, was a true Prophet, and the Idol, who opposed Jehovah, was

was the true, or supreme God, he would take care, that *his* prophet should work *more* and *greater* miracles than *Moses* had done, that he might shew himself to be *supreme*, and that he might *conquer* and *triumph*. When the Israelites then should plainly see, that the Prophet, who would seduce them to Idolatry, could not compare with *Moses* for miraculous works, they must necessarily conclude, that the Idol was not the supreme God ; and that, since *Moses* was *conqueror* still, *Moses* his God was the true God and *Moses*, his true Prophet.

Besides this demonstrative evidence of the Authority of *Moses* from the *Superiority* of his works ; the *Israelites* might be confirm'd in their belief of his divine Authority, by considering, that he particularly foretold that the false Prophet should be permitted to work a miracle, or two. If a false Prophet should arise (like *Mahomet*) without working any miracle at all, no sensible man would believe him. If a false Prophet should work a miracle or two in opposition to *Moses*, this would not avail to *move a doubt* about the Authority of *Moses* inasmuch as *Moses* foretold the coming of such a false Prophet, who should work one or two Miracles. So that his working a Miracle or two would be so far from being an argument *against* the authority of *Moses*, that it would rather be a *proof of it*, as it would be a *fulfilling of his Prediction*.

In like manner the miracles perform'd by the *false Christs*, whom our Savior foretold, could

not move a rational doubt in the minds of honest men. For God's providence would not suffer them to work such *kinds*, and such a *number* of Miracles, as would *deceive the Elect*. Still the old miracles of our Savior, and of his Apostles, by which the Christian Religion was establish'd, even at this distance of time from the working of them, are a much stronger proof of the truth of this Religion, than any miracles that God will ever suffer to be perform'd in opposition to it, can be of its falsehood. For if God should suffer so many miracles to be perform'd before our eyes in opposition to Christianity, as, in the judgement of a reasonable and honest man, are a proof in itself of *equal* force with the miracles of Christ (considering too that we did not *see* these perform'd, but have only an account of them from others ;) the consequence would be, that honest and impartial men would be *necessarily* in a doubt about the truth of the Christian Religion. Therefore we may absolutely conclude, that God will never permit a false Prophet to work such miracles in opposition to Christianity, as shall *be any thing like equal* to the miracles which have been wrought by our Redeemer, and by his Apostles. And as Christ has foretold the coming and miracles of such false Prophets, their coming and miracles will be an accomplishment of his Prediction ; which Prediction must be look'd upon as another miracle wrought by Christ, and a farther evidence of his being sent from God.

2. Sometimes, when God permits a false Prophet to work miracles, he sends a true Prophet to *oppose* and *conquer* him *upon the spot*. Thus there was an opposition between *Moses* and the *Egyptian Magicians*. If the *Magicians* had stood *alone*, wrought miracles, and preach'd a Doctrine that carried in it no contradiction to Reason or to an establish'd Revelation, men would have been obliged to believe them. But because they were *false* Prophets God would not permit them to act *without Opposition*. While the opposition between *them* and *Moses* continued, no one could certainly determine on which side the Truth lay. *Moses* turn'd his Rod into a Serpent: the *Magicians* turn'd their Rods into Serpents too. The Standers by (the poor brickmakers, for whose sake the miracle of *Moses* was wrought, as well as for theirs, who were *learned* in all the wisdom of the *Egyptians*) could see no manner of difference between the one miracle and the other, between the Serpent of *Moses*, and the Serpents of the *Magicians*; and therefore must *necessarily* be thus far in doubt. When *Moses* his Rod *swallow'd up* the Rods of the *Magicians*, the Spectators could not but begin to incline to think, that *Moses* had gain'd the victory, and was thereby proved to be the true Prophet of the most high God. Afterward *Moses* turn'd the *Water into Blood*: the *Magicians* did the *same*. Now the Spectators are held in suspense again; since in this instance *Moses* his God does not shew himself to be more powerful than the invisible being that assisted

assisted the *Magicians*. This suspense and doubt continued, while they saw the *Magicians* bring up *Frogs* upon the land, as *Moses* did, (tho' they could not remove them, *Exod. VIII. 8, 9, 10.*) and while they saw *Moses* turn the *Dust into Lice* in all the land of *Egypt*. For from the foregoing miracles, it was still *likely*, that the Power which help'd the *Magicians* was *able* to *equal* the works of this kind done by the God of *Moses*. But the doubting of the Spectators was perfectly removed, when they perceived, that the *Magicians could go no farther*, and could not, with all their labour, and intreaties to the invisible Power by which they acted, turn the *Dust* of the Land *into Lice*, as *Moses* had done. It now plainly appear'd, that *Moses* was the *Conqueror*, and that his God had tied up the hands of the Power by whose help the *Magicians* acted. *Moses* then went on victorious and triumphant, working six miracles more *after the Magicians own'd they were subdued*, and unable to proceed; and confess'd that *Moses* his works were *done by the finger of God*. And the more completely to shew the Victory obtain'd over the *Magicians*, God order'd that the Boil, which broke forth upon the People of *Egypt*, should break forth upon the *Magicians* themselves. This shew'd that they could not stand before *Moses*, and that their Gods could not deliver them out of the hands of *Jehovah*, *Exod. IX. 11.* And after all this, when he had brought and removed the plagues as he pleased, he still pursued the victory, and commanded the *Sea to divide*

to make a Passage for *Israel*, and to *close again* upon the pursuing *Egyptians*, that they might be destroy'd. The Sea heard his powerful Voice and obey'd. By these *victories* of *Moses* over the *Magicians*, it was plain to the meanest Observer, that *Jehovah*, who imploy'd *Moses*, was *stronger* than the *Egyptian* Gods, who imploy'd the *Magicians*; and was *superior* to them; and that *Moses* was a true Prophet of this supreme God.

Thus *Jehovah* and his Prophet, *Elijah*, triumph'd over *Baal* and his Prophets. 1 *King.* XVIII. 22, &c. In this case indeed God did not suffer the Prophets of *Baal* to work any miracle at all. If he had permitted it, he would have made it plain, in some way or other, to the meanest spectators, that he himself was the true God, and that *Elijah* was his true Prophet. God would not, and did not leave them in suspense. By not suffering *Baal* to enable his Prophets to work any miracle at all, while *Elijah* perform'd a most stupendous miracle by calling down fire from heaven to consume the Sacrifice, and to lick up large quantities of Water, *Jehovah* demonstrated his own supreme Divinity, and *Elijah's* authority and mission from him, so plainly, as that no reasonable and impartial inquirer could possibly doubt.

There was a like contest between *Joseph* and the Wise Men of *Egypt*, when he interpreted *Pharaoh's* Dreams, which they could not: upon which *Pharaoh* own'd the true God, *Gen.* XLI. 8, 16, 25, 28, 32, 38, 39. Another contest on a like occasion happen'd between *Daniel* and the

Chaldean

Chaldean Magicians, about interpreting the Dreams of *Nebuchadnezzar*: in which *Daniel* won the Victory, *Dan.* II. 11, 27, 28. From whence *Nebuchadnezzar* rationally infer'd, that *Daniel's* God was the *true* God, *v.* 47. *C.* IV. 6,—9, 18. *Daniel* again prevail'd about interpreting the Writing upon the Wall in *Belshazzar's* Palace, which the Magicians could not do, *C.* v. 10,—16. Thus also in the contest between *Elymas* and St. *Paul*, the Servant of God plainly conquer'd in striking the other blind, *Act.* XIII. 11, 12.

Besides occasional miracles, the *Jews* had many *standing miracles* among them, such as the Cloud of Glory that cover'd the Mercy-seat, and often appear'd to the people in the wilderness, and the Oracle of *Urim* and *Thummim* in the high Priest's breast-plate, the Water of Jealousy, &c. To which we may add the constant extraordinary interposition of Divine Providence in bestowing mercies, or in sending down Judgments upon them, according as they obey'd, or transgress'd the Laws of God. These things were real miracles, and *standing evidences* of the Truth of the *Jewish* Religion. So that a false Prophet could not then arise, and work miracles among the *Jews*, without being directly and *upon the spot* confronted by these *standing* miracles of the true God. If then a false Prophet should have arisen, and endeavour'd to persuade the *Jews* to forsake the Law and Worship of *Jehovah*, and to worship Idols, and should give them a sign or a wonder, as an argument to incline them to believe in him,

him, and in his Idols; men of common sense, and of common honesty would not have been hereby influenced to forsake, or even to *doubt* of, their Religion. They could not reasonably *forsake* it, unless the false Prophet should work *more and greater* miracles than ever were wrought to confirm it. And they could not reasonably *doubt* of their religion, unless the false Prophet was permitted by the Supreme God to work *as many, and as great* miracles, as were wrought to establish it. If the false prophet would succeed, he must work miracles *greater* than the *standing* miracles of *the Cloud of Glory, Urim, and Thummim*, and *peculiar Providence*; and not only so, but greater than all the miracles that were perform'd by *Moses* in *Egypt*, and in the Wilderness, and by all other persons whomsoever in defense of that Religion. But as nothing like this ever was, or ever could be, done; as God never permitted any false Prophet to do what should *seem to the most careless observer* to be equal to the works of his Servants, but always gave *them* the plainest, and most complete Victory; men of common sense and integrity could not be moved by *a miracle or two* done by a false prophet, which it was also foretold he should do, as a Trial of Men's Steadfastness and Virtue.

It appears now, that when God does permit Miracles to be wrought in opposition to the true Religion, impartial Men could easily determine in favour of Religion by the *superior* number of *victorious* miracles wrought in defense of it.

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Whenever there was a contest, it is fact, that God always took care to give a most obvious and remarkable Victory to his Servants over the Powers that opposed them : so that there could be no room left for a doubt in the case. And when the true Religion (as is the case of the Christian) is not opposed by any miracles at all, the miracles, which were perform'd in confirmation of it, are most uncontestable proofs of its Truth and Divinity.

V. *God directs us to judge of the Pretensions of a Prophet by his working, or not working miracles.* When God was pleas'd to send *Moses*, as his Prophet, to instruct and lead the children of *Israel*, he empower'd him to prove his Mission by working miracles in the sight of the people, and directed him to work them *as means* of inducing the *Israelites* to *believe* in him. And accordingly God expected, that the *Israelites* should hearken to the voice of these Signs, and yield to the Conviction. *Moses* said to God, "They will not believe me, nor hearken to my voice." Then God turn'd his Rod into a Serpent, and back again into a Rod, *That they might believe, that Jehovah, the God of their fathers, had appeared to him.* Then God made *Moses* his hand leprous, and sound again, and said, *If they will not believe thee, nor hearken to the Voice of the first Sign, they will believe the voice of the latter Sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe even these two Signs, neither hearken unto thy Voice, that thou shalt take of the Water of the river,*
and

and pour it upon the dry land, and it shall become blood. Exod. iv. 1,—9.

In like manner, when our blessed Savior came into the world to revele his Father's Grace and Will, he was indow'd with a miraculous power, which he was to make use of as a proof, of his being sent from God. Accordingly he expected, that men should believe in him upon the account of the mighty works, which his Father had empower'd him to do, as evidences of his being really a Divine Prophet. And he declared, that he did *not* expect, men should believe in him at all, *if he had not done* such works of Wonder. Thus it is written, *Joh. v. 36. I have* (says Christ) *greater witness than that of John : for the works, which the Father hath given me to finish, these works, which I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* x. 37, 38. *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not ; but if I do, tho' ye believe not me, yet believe the works ; that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I am in him.* xv. 24. *If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin, in not believing me to be sent from God : but now they have seen the miracles I have done, and therefore have greatly sinned, in that they have hated both me and my Father.* To the same purpose our Savior also speaks, *C. v. 20. x. 24, 25. XIV. 10, 11.*

Agreeably to this Doctrine of our Savior, his Apostles continually refer us to the miracles, which God did by him, as sufficient, infallible, and Di-

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vine proofs of his being a Teacher come from God. *Act. II. 22. Jesus of Nazareth* (saith St. Peter to the *Jews*) *is a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you.* The Apostles continually argued from the particular miracle of Christ's resurrection, as a Demonstration, that he came from God, and was approved of God. And *Nicodemus* judiciously said, *John III. 2. Sir, we know, that you are a teacher come from God: for no one can do these miracles, which you do, unless God be with him.*

The Apostles also founded *their own Character* of Divine Teachers upon the *miracles* which they were inabled to work in confirmation of it. Thus St. Paul says, *2 Cor. XII. 12. The signs of an apostle* (by which he is known to be an apostle) *were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and miracles.* *Heb. II. 4.* God bears witness (both to Christ, and to his apostles) *with signs and wonders, and diverse miracles, and gifts of the holy Ghost, according to his (God's) own will.*

From all this it is plain, that God himself directs us to judge of the true Religion by the miracles, which have been wrought in confirmation of it. Where men are impower'd to work so many, and so great miracles as our blessed Savior and his apostles did; God thereby requires us to receive them as *Oracles*, and to take for *his Truth* whatever they say to us. Where men work such miracles as these without being opposed, we must take it for certain, that God

hath sent them, and assure our selves before hand, that he will not permit these *Oracles* to teach us any thing but what is really *his* truth and will. For to require us to judge by miracles, and yet to suffer false religions to be confirm'd by 'em, wou'd be *requiring* us to believe a *lie*.

It may now be ask'd, whether there is not some other way, whereby we may judge of a man's Pretensions to the Prophetic Office; whether we may not form a judgement of his having a right to the Character or not, by considering the *nature of the doctrine* which he teaches? In answer to this, it must be added,

VI. A man's preaching *true* Doctrine will not *alone* prove him to be a prophet sent from God. A man may know much Truth without being immediately inspired by God. And all the Truth, which it is possible for a man to *know without inspiration*, he may *preach* to others without any *extraordinary* Assistance of the Holy Spirit: so that his preaching it will not prove that he has the Spirit.

VII. A Man's teaching *new* Doctrines, which were not known before, and which *mere reason* could not discover, will not *alone* prove him to be a prophet sent from God. For if these new Doctrines do imply a Contradiction, they must be immediately rejected as impossible to come from God. But if they do not imply a contradiction, their not being obviously false will not be thought an argument that they are certainly true. Still the question will arise, whether these new Doctrines are *Divine Revelations*, or the

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inventions of men's own heads? Tho' *Reason* could not *discover* them, yet *fancy* might *invent* them. And therefore something more than the mere nature of the Doctrine, which a man teaches, is necessary to prove, that he is a Prophet sent from God.

VIII. *False Doctrine* will certainly prove the man that teaches it not to be a true Prophet. *It is impossible for God to lie. He cannot be tempted, nor can he tempt men to evil.* It is as impossible for the God of Truth to direct any man to teach us the least Falsehood, as it is for two and two to make thirteen. His infinite Wisdom, Holiness and Goodness secure us, that he will not deceive his Creatures. If then a man comes, and preaches falsehoods in the name of God, we may be assured, that he is a false prophet, and that God has never sent him.

From hence likewise we may most certainly infer, that a wise and holy God will never suffer such a false teacher to work miracles in such circumstances, as should persuade any honest, and impartial inquirer to believe him. As sure as we are, that a man teaches false Doctrine, so sure we may always be *before hand*, that he will never be able to work such miracles in Defense of it, as shall necessarily impose upon men of common discernment and application.

It is necessary next to inquire, By what *rule* must we judge that a Doctrine *in it self is false*? In answer to this, it must be observed,

IX. That a Doctrine is proved to be false *in it self*, when it is shew'd to be *contrary to Reason*,

son, or to a former *Revelation* confirm'd by *Miracles*. Both these are *Divine* Rules of Truth; and whatever is contrary to either of them is certainly false.

1. A Doctrine is *false* in it self, when it is contrary to *Reason*, or when it implies a *Contradiction*. If we could not be certain, that a Doctrine which really implies a contradiction, is false; It would be impossible we could be certain, that any thing is true. Our Reason indeed cannot *discover* every truth, which it is now necessary for us to know: for the knowledge of some important Truths is intirely owing to Divine Revelation. But *Reason* is as proper and certain a measure of *natural* Truth, as Revelation is of that which is *thereby* discover'd, Reason teaches us the being and attributes of God, in the most certain and demonstrative manner. So that when any Doctrine contradicts the natural knowledge we have of the attributes of God, or of the duties we owe to him; as sure as we are that we have *reason'd rightly* about these things, so sure we may be, that that Doctrine and the person, who teaches it, cannot come from God. If a man should pretend to be a prophet of God, and teach us, as in the Name of God, that God does not love and regard holiness and virtue, or that men may lawfully persecute such as differ from them: we might immediately infer from his teaching these false Doctrines, that he is a false Prophet; and might thereupon be *assured* too, that a Good, and Faithful God will not suffer him to confirm his false Doctrines by miracles.

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It must here be added, That if we would judge a man to be a false Prophet by the Doctrine he teaches, as being *contrary to Reason*, and implying a *Contradiction*, we must be careful to *reason well*, and to judge *according to Truth in the fear of God*; well remembering, that if we condemn a true doctrine as false, *before* we have *well examin'd* it, and upon the account of that doctrine reject the Divine Prophet that teaches it, we shall thereby expose our selves to the *Indignation* of God.

2. A Doctrine is *false in it self*, when it is contrary to a *Revelation confirm'd by Miracles*. A revelation, that really came from God, is as proper and certain a Standard of Truth as Reason it self. For instance, when God reveled his will to the Israelites by *Moses*, and confirm'd his Mission and character by many, great, and stupendous Miracles, his Law was to be look'd upon as a *Divine Rule of Truth*: so that if any man should arise, and teach any thing contrary to the maxims of that Divine Law, his teaching contrary to them would immediately, and without any more ado, *demonstrably* prove him to be a false Prophet. If a man had come and taught the Jews, that *they* might lawfully *eat blood*, they might from thence have certainly concluded that he was a false prophet, because he taught what was contrary to an *unrepeled* Divine Law, and what was thereby known to be false. Thus also to the Case of worshipping false Gods, the Rule of Judging was the Divine, written, Law of *Moses*. If a Prophet should arise and persuade
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the Jews to worship other Gods, they might immediately infer from this his Doctrine, that he was a false Prophet. They knew, that the teaching men to worship other Gods, was false Doctrine, because it was contrary to the Doctrine of the One God taught in the establish'd Law of *Moses*. And they knew, that whatever was contrary to the Law of *Moses* was false, because the One God confirm'd the Revelation of *Moses* by uncontested Miracles. They might know the latter to be a false prophet, because he contradicted a true Prophet. If it be ask'd, How they might know *Moses* to be a true Prophet? the answer is, because God confirm'd his mission, authority, and inspiration by *miracles*. If the reader, forgetting what has been already said, should here ask, But suppose this false Prophet, who contradicts *Moses*, and persuades the Jews to worship other Gods, should confirm his doctrine by miracles as well as *Moses*; whom of the two contenders must they then believe? He must be desired to remember, that the Contest in this case would really be between the *Idols*, and *Jehovah the God of the Jews*: whether *they* are *superior*, or at least *equal*, to him, or whether *he* is *supreme* over all? If these *Idols* in such a contest should do *greater* and *more* miracles than *Jehovah*, the Spectators would be *necessarily* constrain'd to judge, that *they* were *superior*, and so that, whatever *Jehovah* was else, *he* could not be the *supreme* God. If these *Idols* had done miracles *equal* to those done by *Jehovah*, the Spectators would have been *necessarily* constrain'd to

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think of Jehovah, and the Idols, as upon a *level*, and to look upon him as one of their Number. If a Philosophic head imagines he could have found the Difference by other means, yet the bulk of Mankind, especially in the less improved ages and nations of the World (for whom religion is design'd as well as for the *little handful* of Philosophers) would have been under a *necessity* of being deceived in this most important affair, of judging who is the true God, in case the true God had suffer'd his Rivals, the heathen Idols, to work as many, and as great Miracles as himself. Men might then assure themselves, that the one true God would not suffer the Idols to give such evidences of their Divinity, and government of the world, as they should necessarily deceive honest inquirers after the True God.

From what has been now said, we may more clearly see the justice and reasonableness of the interpretation I have before suggested of that remarkable Passage in the Law of *Moses*, *Deut. XIII. 1*, and *2, 3*. If there arise among You (says *Moses* to the *Jews*) a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a sign, or a wonder, and the sign, or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, *Let us go after other Gods* (which thou hast not known) *and let us serve them*: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams: For the Lord your God proveth you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with

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“ all your Soul ; ” or whether you love idols together with him.

The Case mention'd in this text, has been thought by many to be a case that must be determin'd *merely by reason*, and by the *nature of the Doctrine* consider'd *in it self*, without any regard to *Miracles* at all. But it now appears, I think, to be quite otherwise. The *Jews*, by *this* text, were not sent to their mere natural *Reason* to examin who was the true God, whether Jehovah, or the Idols of the heathens. They were directed to determine this controversy in a way much shorter, and vastly easier to the *bulk* of mankind, *by their very Senses*. They were taught to look to the *miracles* which were wrought by *Jehovah*, as the evidences of his *Divinity*. These his miracles were as certain Proofs of his existence and Dominion, as the works of creation are, and fully as much adapted to prove his existence and Dominion, to the conviction of Mankind, as the *regular* course of nature, if not more. If then a false prophet should arise, and persuade the People to leave the worship of Jehovah, and to worship other Gods, he would hereby really persuade them to throw up all the Conviction of their *Senses* derived from miracles, which bore witness to the existence and Dominion of Jehovah. If then a prophet should arise, and persuade the *Israelites* to go after other Gods, he would be known to preach false Doctrine, because his doctrine was contrary to the Law of *Moses* which was confirm'd by *Miracles*. This is fairly hinted, *v. 5.*

where *Moses* says, “ *That* Prophet shall be put
 “ to death, because he hath spoken to turn you
 “ away from *Jehovah* your God, who brought
 “ you out of the Land of *Egypt*, and redeem’d
 “ you out of the house of Bondage, to thrust
 “ thee out of the way, which *Jehovah* thy God
 “ commanded thee to walk in.” *Moses* in these
 words does not direct the *Israelites* to judge by
 their *Reason*, (tho’ that also would have proved)
 that the Doctrine of worshiping other Gods
 was false: but he directs them to judge that
 it was false, because it was contrary to the *Way*
 in which *Jehovah* their God, in his Law had
 commanded them to walk; and because it was
 turning them from *Jehovah* who brought them
 out of *Egypt* in a *miraculous* way: i. e. they
 were to judge it to be false, because it was
 contrary to the *Jewish* Religion which was
 founded on the Miracles that procured their de-
 liverance out of *Egypt*.

Agreeably to this we must take notice, that
 God has directed men to judge of his Divinity
 and Dominion by the many *Prophecies* which
 he has deliver’d, and fulfil’d; and to infer that
 the heathen Idols have no real Divinity because
 they cannot foretel things to come, as God did.
 Upon this head God challenges and insults the
 heathen Idols, *Isai.* XLI. 21, 22, 23. “ Produce
 “ your Cause, saith *Jehovah*, bring forth your
 “ strong reasons, saith the King of *Jacob*. Let
 “ them bring them forth, and shew us what
 “ shall happen: let them shew the former things
 “ what they be, that we may consider them,

“ and know the latter end of them, or declare
 “ to us future things. Shew the things that
 “ are to come hereafter, that we may know,
 “ that ye are Gods: yea, do good, or do evil,
 “ that we may be dismay’d.” See also to the
 same purpose, *Isai.* XLIV. 6, 7, 8. XLV. 20, 21.
Jer. XIV. 22. From these Passages we may most
 certainly conclude, that the true God never
 did, and never would permit the heathen Idols
 to prophesy, and to work miracles in order to
 fulfil their Predictions, in such circumstances, as
 should necessarily deceive an honest inquirer after
 the true God. If God would ever permit such
 a thing, he could not have made his fortelling
 things to come an evidence of his Divinity.
 For that can be no good proof of his Divinity,
 which would have equally proved the Divinity
 of false Gods. Nay God’s Challenges here do
 directly suppose, that the idols in fact did not
 foretel things to come, that they in fact did not
do good or evil in a miraculous way. And in
 these Challenges made to the idols, God does
 expressly allow the *Israelites* to believe in and
 worship those idols, as soon as ever those idols
 could work miracles and prophesy like himself.
Shew (says Jehovah to the Idols) *the things that*
are to come hereafter, that we may know, that
ye are Gods.

From hence it demonstrably follows, that the
 Case put in *Deut.* XIII. 1, 2, 3. is not of Idols
 foretelling *many* wonders, and bringing them to
 pass, like Jehovah. For in *Isaiab* God expressly
 says, the Idols never should, and never could do

so. The case put in *Deut.* is only of an Idol's foretelling *one* wonder, which comes to pass accordingly : which still leaves it most *undoubted*, that God is as much above these Idols, as his Prophecies and Miracles have, both in *number* and *greatness*, been immensely superior to the *one* miracle of the Idols.

The appeal here is not to the *Nature* of the Doctrine taught by the Prophet of the Idols, but *wholly to Miracles*. This will be plain from considering the Nature of the Doctrine it self. *Moses* tells us, *Jehovah* is the only God. The false Prophet says, *Baal* is God. The question then is, Who is the God, we should worship, The God of the *Jews*, or the God of their neighbours ? These two have given different Rules of worship, and different Laws. How shall we know who of these two, *Jehovah*, or *Baal*, is the true God, and has it in his power to reward, or punish us ? Suppose a man should think, that *Jehovah*, and *Baal*, are neither of them the most high God, but both subordinate beings : how could such a man judge, whether he must hearken to the prophet of *Jehovah*, or to the Prophet of *Baal* ? Could he judge by the *nature* of the Doctrine which prophet he must follow ? *Moses*, the Prophet of *Jehovah* appointed Sacrifices and innumerable costly and painful Ceremonies, as parts of his religion. If many men, who now set up for judging of all things by *mere* reason, were to determine concerning *Moses* his being a Prophet or not, by the *nature* of the Religion he taught, they would

be positive, that *Moses* was not a true prophet, and that *Jehovah*, who sent him was not the true God. They would fancy they saw Ceremonies in the Religion appointed by *Moses* as odd and foolish as any in the Worship of *Baal*, excepting that of *Baal's Priests cutting themselves*; which perhaps was not an *institution* of their Religion, but the suddain effects of a mere fit of *private Zeal*. But if this was an appointment of *Baal's Religion*, and from thence we would infer, that it could not be the Religion of a *Good God*: an enemy to the *Jewish* religion would urge, in like manner, that the *costly* and burdensome rites of the *Jewish* religion could not be instituted by a God of *Goodness*, who loves to make religion as *easy* as possible to his creatures; and that those ceremonies of the *Jewish* Religion, which seem *childish* and *trifling* could not be appointed by a God of infinite *Wisdom*. If then men were left to judge of the pretensions of a Prophet by the *nature* of the Religion he teaches, they would as often judge wrong as right. I am sensible, if men did *reason truly* about the nature of Religion, they would always see through the Objections that are rais'd against every *true* religion from the *nature* of it. And if we, like God, did know the *reason* of every particular institution of the *Jewish* Religion, we should see, that in the Circumstances of the *Jews*, it was full of admirable wisdom; and that the omission of any one ceremony of it would have been a prejudice to the excellent Scheme. But while we cannot

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perceive the *whole* contrivance, or the particular end and usefulness of some parts of the institution, many things in it will *seem to be* objections against the Divine Original of it. Unless then we *perfectly* know the nature of a Religion, and *all the reasons* of every part and ceremony of it, we may not be able to determine from the *Nature* of it, that it is, or is not, from God. If it be free from requiring or allowing men to do what is downright vicious, it *may be* from God, tho' there should be many ceremonies in it, of which we cannot discern the Reason. It is plainly necessary then, that the *wisest* of men should have *another* method of judging concerning the pretensions of a Prophet, besides the consideration of the *nature* of the Doctrine and Religion which he teaches. This other method depends upon *Miracles*. Accordingly, as I observed before, the appeal is made to Miracles in the text now cited from *Deut.*

The Case there put is of a Contest between *Jehovah*, and the Heathen Idols. The Dispute is, Whom of them the *Jews* should serve and worship? Whether they should practise the religion which *Jehovah* instituted among them by *Moses*, or another religion instituted by one of the Idols? Who was Superior; God, or the Idols? Whether if they did worship *Jehovah*, he was able to save them from the hands of his enemies the Idols, and to give them a reward? or whether if they did worship the Idols, these were able to save them from the wrath of *Jehovah*, who would be angry, if his worship was neglected?

glected? No method in the world is fitter to decide these questions than this of working miracles. It is plain to our sense, that *he* must be the Governor of the world, who has power to make what changes he pleases in nature. It is obvious, that he, who can dispose of all things in heaven and earth, has power to punish us for our sins, and to reward our Obedience. And when the two opposite Powers, *Jehovah* and an Idol, set themselves to work miracles, it is the plainest case in the world, that *he* is the superior and stronger person, who ties up the hands of the other, and will not suffer him to perform any miracle at all, or more than one, or two. If *Baal* were stronger than *Jehovah*, he would not suffer *Jehovah* to tie up his hands; but he would assert his Superiority, and not lie still under the disgrace of being conquer'd and in chains. The plain reason why *Baal* does not conquer and triumph is because he *cannot*. *Jehovah* is really above him. Consequently we see, that if we obey and worship *Jehovah*, he is able to reward us: and we need not fear the threatnings that *Baal* and his priests denounce against us for forsaking his Altars; for Our God, who has always conquer'd him in every contest, is perfectly able to deliver us out of his hands. If then a false God would have laid claim to the service and worship of the *Jews*, he must have proved his Power and Dominion, as *Jehovah* did his, by uncontested Miracles. If an Idol would set himself up to be worship'd *equally* with *Jehovah*, he must shew an *equal* power
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and dominion over the things of the world, and work *as many and great* miracles both in earth and heaven, as *Jehovah* did. And if an Idol would set up for the *only God*, and as *Superior* to *Jehovah*, he must shew *greater* power and dominion than *Jehovah* has done, by working *more and greater* miracles than *Jehovah* has done, and by giving uncontestable proofs of a *victory* obtain'd over him. Till these things are done, which a wise, holy, good and faithful God will take care shall not even *seem* to be done, every man of common sense and integrity would see sufficient reason for believing in *Jehovah* as the most high God, and for adhering to all that he shou'd teach and require; in opposition to all weak pretenders to Truth and divinity. The Contest then between the true and false *God* must be decided by *Miracles*. And the contest between a true and false *prophet*, *i. e.* between a prophet of the true God, and a prophet of an Idol, must be decided by the same means. The false prophet, whom *Moses* supposes to arise, and to persuade the *Jews* to Idolatry, and the Idol that imploy'd him, would hereby contend with *Jehovah* and his prophet *Moses*. How does this text direct them to determine in the Case? Does it direct them to judge by the different Doctrines? No. Does it direct them to judge *without* a regard to Miracles? No. But on the contrary this rule given by *Moses* ultimately resolves the *whole matter* into *miracles*, and makes the Miracles wrought by the true Prophet the *proper*, and, in this case,

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the *only* evidence, that the Person who opposes him, is a false prophet. The false prophet is known to be wrong because he opposes a Right religion; which is known to be right, because it was instituted by the most high God. And this Jewish Religion was known to be instituted by the *most high God*, because it was instituted by one that *conquer'd*, and triumph'd over, the Gods of *Egypt*, whom he hinder'd from inabling their Prophets and *Magicians* to work miracles whenever he pleas'd, and shew'd by a continual series of miraculous Providences, that he had such an absolute command and disposal of all things in earth and heaven, as to be able effectually and for ever to secure to his servants and worshippers all the Rewards and happiness that he had promised them.

When the true God had given such evidences of his supremacy, he might, without any danger to the faith of impartial men, permit a false prophet to arise, and to give a sign, or a wonder that should come to pass *for the trial* of his people. But he would still take care, that the false prophet should not work miracles in such circumstances as should prove a stumbling-block to good and impartial men. For *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither doth he tempt any man*; i. e. he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear; but will with the temptation make a way for our escaping the Sin to which he suffers us to be tempted. *James*

13. 1 Cor. X. 13.

X. It is possible we may be *fully satisfied*, that a prophet is really sent by God, *merely by his Miracles, before* we have heard one word of the *doctrine*, which he is sent to teach. I observe this in opposition to those who have unwarily said, that miracles in themselves are but *probable*, not *demonstrative*, proofs of the Divine authority of a Prophet; and that we must wait to hear his Doctrine, and must judge of the *nature* of his Doctrine, whether it is *in it self* worthy of God, or not, before we can tell, whether the miracles he has wrought are a proof of his Divine mission or not. But this is a plain mistake. If this were true, we never could have full satisfaction that any man is a Divine Prophet as long as he lives. If we must wait to hear his Doctrine, before we can know, whether his miracles are from God, or not; we must wait to hear *all* his Doctrine. For if the Doctrine he preaches the *first year* of his Prophefying be found upon examination to be worthy of God; we cannot (according to this odd way of putting cases that never can happen) be sure but that the *next year*, he will contradict some part of his first year's doctrine, or teach something *absurd* in it self, and unworthy of God; or that he will do so some time or other *before he dies*. So that, according to *this* way of thinking, we can never be sure, that a prophet is sent from God, and that his miracles were wrought by a Divine power, *until he is dead*, and is by death render'd incapable of teaching any doctrine that is false, and

unworthy of God: and even then, upon this Principle, there may be room to doubt still.

They that have said, *Miracles are no full proof, till their own Divinity is proved by the nature of the Doctrine they are wrought to confirm*, have deceived themselves by supposing two things that are plainly false, *viz.* That a man, who works miracles without being opposed is capable of teaching a Doctrine unworthy of God; and that miracles are always to be wrought *after the Doctrine* is deliver'd. Unless they had gone upon these Suppositions, they could not have been mistaken in this case. Whereas it is very evident, that these Suppositions are groundless. *That* man, to whom God communicates the Power of working miracles, is always under the especial Guidance of his Spirit, who will lead him into all necessary Truth, and not suffer him to say the least thing *in the name of God*, that God has not really directed him to speak. Or if such a Prophet should apostatise from God and from the truth, and should teach any false doctrine, (whether our Reason could discover it to be false, or not) that very moment would God take from him his power of miracles, and if that would not be enough, would also immediately raise up a true Prophet to oppose and subdue him. All this is necessary to be supposed, because else men would be laid under an *unavoidable necessity* of being drawn into error. This is confirm'd to Christians by what our Savior says, *Mark ix. 39. No man, who shall do a miracle in my name, shall immediately speak lightly of me; and by*

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St. Paul's saying, 1 Cor. XII. 3. that *no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed*, or teacheth any other false Doctrine: for the reason why he cannot call Jesus accursed is, because it is false Doctrine.

The Notion I am now considering is built also upon a Supposition, that miracles are to be wrought *after the doctrine* is deliver'd. For if all the miracles are wrought first, and the doctrine is deliver'd afterward, these Gentlemen would not think of our being under a necessity of waiting to hear the Doctrine, before we could judge, whether the miracles were from God, or not. The miracles themselves, and the Circumstances in which they are wrought may *most demonstrably assure us*, that they are from God, before we have heard one word of the Doctrine that the Prophet is commission'd to deliver. Let us take the Instance of *Moses* in *Egypt*. When he was contending with the *Magicians*, and overcame them, there was (strictly speaking) not so much a contention between men, as between *Jehovah* and the Idols. Thus it is continually represented in the history. Thus *Exod. VIII. 10. To morrow the frogs shall be removed, that thou (Pharaoh) mayst know that there is none like to the Lord our God. v. 22. I (says God) will sever the Land of Goshen—to the end thou mayst know, that I am the Lord in the midst of the Earth.* See to the same purpose, C. III. 13, 14. V. 2. VII. 5, 17. IX. 14, 29. X. 2. XI. 7. XII. 12. XIV. 4, 17, 18, 25, 31. XV. 11. In like manner the *first* Design of the mi-

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racles done by the *Apostles among the heathens* was to prove that the God of the Jews was the most high God, and that the Gentiles should turn from idols to him. See my *Notes and Discourses*, p. 58—61. But to return to the miracles of *Moses*. The contest was, who had the greatest Right to the service and worship of the Israelites. It soon appear'd, that *Moses* his God was stronger than all the opposite Deities, and that he had tied up their hands. It was plain then that *Jehovah* was the most high God. And since he made *Moses* his instrument in performing these miracles, he thereby demonstrably proved, that *Moses* was *his* Servant. These miracles proved, that *Moses* had an extraordinary assistance of God's Spirit, and that the People ought to hear and obey him in all things whatever he should say to them. The first and immediate inference with regard to *Moses*, to be drawn from his miracles, was, that he was *an Oracle*: the next step was, that such a particular Doctrine was true, because this *Oracle* taught it, or that such a particular thing must be done, because this *oracle* commanded it. When *Moses* had gain'd the victory over the *Magicians*, and had finish'd his ten first miracles, he had given every reasonable man full satisfaction, that he was sent from God, tho' he had not happen'd yet to say one word about the Religion he was to teach. Upon this conviction, that his miracles were divine, and that he was hereby demonstrated to be a *Divine Oracle*, a reasonable man would take it for a most certain thing, that it was *impossible for this Oracle*

Oracle to teach any thing that is false. The miracles God did by him were a *Security from God*, that he would *not suffer* him to *mislead* the people. These miracles *before hand* were *Divine pledges* design'd to assure men, that *Moses* should be preserved faithful in the execution of his prophetic office. If God had foreseen, that *Moses* would have taught the people errors in the name of the Lord, he would not have chosen *him* to be his prophet, nor have employ'd *him* to work those miracles in proof of his Divine mission. *God knows whom he sends.* He would not have sent *Moses*, if *Moses* had not been a *proper* Person. *Moses* would not have been a proper person, if he would *ever teach* errors in the name of God. But God's testimony to him by miracles was a Declaration, that *God chose* him as a *proper* person to instruct the Jews: from hence they might be assured, that he *was* a proper person; and consequently, that he was really an *Oracle*, and should *never be suffer'd* to mislead them. Thus they might be sure, before they had heard one word of his Doctrine, *that it would be true*, and worthy of God, and that it would *appear to be so* upon the *strictest* examination. The proof then of a man's being a prophet or an Oracle may be full, and demonstrative, before he has deliver'd one word of his Doctrine. To ask, what if his Doctrine should afterward appear to be unworthy of God? is really to ask, what if *God* should be *disappointed* in the man he chose for a prophet? or what if *God* should *contradict himself*? It is impossible, and

and I think, impious, to suppose any of these things. By the victorious miracles which *Moses* perform'd in *Egypt*, and at the Red sea, it was absolutely demonstrated to any reasonable man, that *God had chosen Moses* for a prophet, or an *Oracle*. The People then might be assured before hand, that all the Doctrines and precepts he should afterward deliver would be in themselves true and worthy of God. And upon the testimony of *these* miracles, if *Moses* had not done any more afterward, the people might have been most *rationally* and fully satisfied, that the Religion he taught them was Divine, and that they ought to worship God in the manner *Moses* should direct. They might be as absolutely sure before hand, before they had heard one Doctrine, or command of his Religion, that all *would* be right and worthy of God, as they could afterward by the most strict examination of every particular Doctrine and command, upon the principles of Reason. Nay if there be any difference, the advantage lies on the side of the *Prophet*. I am sensible *true Reason is never wrong*. But such short sighted, ignorant creatures as we are, are liable to suppose that to be reasonable which is not so. Upon this account, I am satisfied, that there is more danger of our imagining a Doctrine or precept of *Moses's* religion to be unworthy of God, when we examin it, *in it self* by *mere* principles of natural *reason*, than there is of our being mistaken in judging that a man, who did such miracles as *Moses* did,

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these was certainly an *Oracle*, and that all he should say would certainly be true.

Let us apply the same reasoning to an instance in the Christian Religion. St. *Paul* wrought many miracles at *Philippi*, (*Act. xvi.*) without being opposed. This assured the Spectators, *before* they had heard his Doctrine, that he was a true Prophet, or an *Oracle*. From this they might rationally conclude, that when they should *hereafter* know his Doctrine, and examin it, they should not be able to find any thing in it unworthy of God. Upon *this* principle the *Philippians* afterward *did* actually receive the *epistle* he wrote to them. As soon as ever they were sure, St. *Paul* wrote it, they could not but conclude, before they had read one word of it, that there was nothing in it false or unworthy of God, and that every part of it would bear the *strictest* examination. And I dare say, that those very writers, who have gone upon the Notion I am opposing, would act in this very same manner, in a like case. They already believe, that St. *Paul* wrought miracles, and that he was an *Oracle*. I will suppose then, that another epistle of St. *Paul* written after he was an apostle, besides the 14 we have already, should be discover'd in some dark corner of the world : I will suppose it could be proved to their full conviction that this fifteenth epistle was written by St. *Paul's own hand* : immediately then, to be sure, these Gentlemen would receive the whole epistle in *Gross* as containing nothing but

but truth ; and would conclude before hand with the greatest assurance, that after they should read it, and examin every particular Sentence in it with the utmost care and nicety, they should not be able to find any thing in it inconsistent with reason, unworthy of the apostle, or unworthy of God. It is plain, that Divine Revelations will always bear the strictest examination. And we may be absolutely certain it is a divine Revelation by the Miracles perform'd by him that brings it, before we know what the revelation is.

This same thing will be confirm'd by another consideration. In the bible there are many passages which *no man living understands*, particularly in the *Prophets*. There is some doctrine or other taught in those dark passages. But as we do not know what the Doctrine is, it is impossible we should know *from the nature of the Doctrine it self*, whether it be worthy of God or not. How do the Gentlemen I am now opposing, *know* that this *unknown* Doctrine is worthy of God? For any thing they know *from the nature of the Doctrine it self* in those dark passages, it may be contrary to reason, and unworthy of God. And then (to speak in their manner) this false Doctrine will confute all the pretended evidence of miracles wrought by those prophets. If the Doctrine in these dark passages should be unworthy of God, the whole Revelation must be rejected for it's sake. But for any thing they know from the *nature* of those unknown doctrine

doctrines, the doctrines *may be* unworthy of God ; and then they cannot be sure, that the Revelation is *yet establish'd* ; and *never can* be sure of it, till they shall be let into the knowledge of all the Doctrines contain'd in those *dark* passages, and shall find upon an *actual* examination of *every one* of them, that they are *all* worthy of God. This is the necessary consequence of the principle I am opposing. But they who have advanced it, are very far, I am sensible, from having any doubt about the authority of Revelation upon the account of the dark, unintelligible passages either of the old Testament, or of the new. Now, while they do not pretend to know what Doctrines are contain'd in those dark passages, they are perfectly satisfied, that those Doctrines are really in themselves true, and worthy of God. Upon what principle do they believe this? Surely not upon their own, which makes the knowing the Doctrine, and the *nature* of it, necessary to our judging, whether the miracles wrought to confirm it are divine proofs of it, or not. In this case they do in fact (as indeed it is unavoidable they should) go upon a principle *contrary* to their own, and suppose, that the miracles done by the Prophets proved them to be *Oracles*, and consequently that what they have written as Prophets, whether we understand it or not, contains nothing that is untrue, or unworthy of God. In this case they themselves do not judge of the miracles by the Doctrine ; but take the Doctrine *upon content*, because of

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the Miracles. Let them be consistent with themselves, and do so always; and then I shall have gain'd my end.

Besides, that Miracles *by themselves* are sufficient, and *Demonstrative* proofs of a Religion, without thinking of the *nature of the Doctrine*, (which however will always bear the strictest examination of true reason) will be very evident from considering what is to be understood by this Expression, *The nature of the Doctrine*. The Doctrines taught by a Prophet may be points of Speculation, Rules of Life, promises of rewards, threatnings of punishment, histories of facts which could not be known by men, prophecies of things future, &c. Concerning all which it is to be observed, that Doctrines may be of *three* sorts; either such as mere natural reason can discover to be *true* without a revelation; or such as reason can discover to be *false*; or such as reason cannot prove to be true, or false. As to the first, there does not seem to be any great necessity of working miracles on *their* Account. It is not likely that God would send men with a Power of Miracles merely to tell us what our natural Reason had discover'd to us all before. Miracles could be *of no use*, if they were perform'd by a Man that teaches such Doctrines as are plainly *contrary to Reason*. Upon which account (*viz.* because miracles shall not be render'd *useless*) we may assure our selves, that God will not permit such men to work miracles as teach doctrines that are plainly contrary
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to reason ; or, which is much the same, that he will not suffer such as work miracles, to teach such false Doctrines. I add here in the words of Mr. *Locke*, (whose Discourse on Miracles is well worth reading) that “ These supernatural
 “ Signs being the *only means* God is conceived
 “ to have to satisfy men as rational Creatures of
 “ the certainty of any thing he would reveal, as
 “ coming from himself, *can never consent* that
 “ it should be wrested out of his hands, to serve
 “ the ends, and establish the Authority of an
 “ inferior Agent that rivals him.” *Locke's posthumous Works, p. 227, 228. Octavo edit.*

The great use of Miracles then must be to confirm the Truth of such Doctrines as our natural Reason cannot of it self discover to be either true or false. Natural reason cannot discover a *future State of Rewards and Punishments*, the *Mediator*, the *way of worshiping God acceptably through him*, &c. As we cannot discover these things without a Revelation, there is need of some extraordinary proof of the truth of these Doctrines. Miracles are such a proof as is needed. We want to know that the promise of a Reward in the world to *come*, and the command to worship God *thro' a Mediator*, are not the *inventions* of men, but really the command and Promise of *God*. To convince us of this, God sends a Person to work various and plain miracles, which the man could not do unless God were with him. His miracles then shew that God is with him. Since God is thus with him, it is plain, God *approves* and

employs him, and gives these miracles as a *pledge*, that God has communicated his mind and will to this Prophet, so that we may depend upon it, that he has received his instructions from God, and that *God knows him* to be one that will *faithfully* report them to us. It is easy to see how by this mean God can give us full assurance of the truth of a Revelation, which shall contain such histories of facts, promises, threatnings, and Laws of God as it is not possible for mere human Reason to discover.

From these things it is very evident, that there is no necessity of considering *the nature* of the Doctrine in order to discover that the miracles are a proof of it. For if we could not know that miracles are a proof of a doctrine, unless we knew the *nature* of the Doctrine it self, the consequence would be, that *no doctrine whatsoever could be proved by miracles*. To be sure doctrines evidently *contrary to reason* cannot be proved to be true by any miracles. Doctrines *certainly* known to be *true* by natural *reason* can hardly be said to be proved by miracles: inasmuch as they are so well proved by natural reason, that a man cannot more firmly believe them, after the miracles, than he did before. If a Prophet, who has wrought a thousand miracles should assure me, as a Prophet, in the Name of God, that *two and two make four*, I should not believe it one jot the more for this testimony: since I believed it before with a faith as strong as it is possible for me to entertain. And in all such points, wherein
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reason says nothing, but leaves us in Doubt, Miracles, according to this way of talking, could not be any proof at all. For if we examin the nature of such Doctrines, we shall find them to be what they really are, neither proved, nor condemn'd by *reason*. They may be true; they may be false for any thing I can see in their *nature*. Here is plainly then no proof of their being true to be drawn from the *nature* of the doctrines themselves. If then they are proved at all, they must be proved by miracles. *All* the proof of them lies in the miracles. If the miracles prove them, the miracles prove them *without any assistance* from the Doctrine. If the miracles *demonstrate* the truth of these Doctrines, the miracles are *by themselves*, and in their own nature, demonstrative proof.

It is true indeed, the Doctrine to be proved by miracles must be in it self capable of being proved, and must be capable of being proved by miracles. The consequence which some men would draw from this undoubted Maxim, is, That if a false Prophet should work ten thousand miracles to prove that two and two make thirteen, those miracles would really be no proof of this Absurdity. I should rather say, this is an impossible supposition; even as impossible as it is for God to assert with his own immediate voice, that two and two make thirteen. The inference then, that we ought to draw from the abovesaid Maxim, is this, That unless the Doctrine be capable of being proved by miracles,
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God will not suffer any one to work such Miracles in confirmation of it as should deceive the impartial Searcher after the true Religion. The *peculiar* Doctrines and precepts of the *Jewish* Religion, which are not a part of Natural Religion, might be from God, or might not : their own *nature* would not determine which. Reason cannot discover the necessity there was to oblige the *Jews* to worship God with all those rites and Ceremonies which were appointed by the Law of *Moses*. Men could not discover any *natural good* in those Ceremonies. But on the other hand good men would think, that an alwise God could see farther than they, and might discern that this *Jewish* Religion and all the rites of it were the fittest that could be devised for *that* people, considering all the Circumstances they were in, and the relation they bore to a *future Messiah*, and to the *Christian* Church. It is plain then such a Religion *consider'd in it self* might be from God, or might not. As it is not inconsistent with our natural Notions of God, it is plainly capable of being proved by miracles. And accordingly it has been proved by miracles to be a divine Institution. But according to the way of making Suppositions and putting cases which some men are fallen into, it would be impossible ever to be satisfied that such a Religion was from God. For they would ask, Suppose a Man should teach a New Religion, which should contain in it true natural Religion, and should add to it some promises

that are not taught by, nor inconsistent with it, and should appoint some forms of Worship as approved of God, and ordain'd by him, which are neither taught, nor condemn'd, by Natural Reason: Suppose all this while the man that teaches these things had really invented them out of his own head, and had not learn'd them from God: and then suppose (as these men would put the case) that this false teacher should work many great and plain miracles without being opposed: I say, when all these suppositions are made, I ask these men, whether they would look upon these miracles as a proof that the said Doctrines and Rules of worship came from God? I am sensible they will say, these miracles could not prove this, because the thing is really false in itself. I ask then, how they could possibly know, that such doctrines and rules of worship are not from God? By the Supposition, there is nothing in them that *reason* can discover to be unworthy of God. For any thing we can see in the Doctrines and Rules of worship themselves, they may be from God. If miracles then should be wrought in Defense of them, without opposition, here would be *all the proof* of them, that such things are *capable* of receiving. Yet in the case now put, the miracles would be really no proof. And yet every observer would unavoidably think it to be good proof; and so would be under a *necessity* of receiving that as a Divine Religion, which is really only the invention of Men. How could they extricate themselves

selves out of this Difficulty? The miracles seem to be full proof; and the religion is so politically devised, that there is nothing in it contrary to reason. Such a religion then (upon the absurd Supposition I am opposing) would be in it self really false, or not Divine; and yet by miracles be proved to be true, or divine in the opinion of every one that believed the miracles, and that saw there was nothing in this religion unworthy of God. It appears now, that the putting such a case implies a contradiction, *viz.* That a Religion is from God, and is not from God at the same time. Consequently this Supposition must not be made, *i. e.* the case can never happen; or, God will never suffer any deceiver to work miracles in defense of human inventions, which shall unavoidably mislead honest and impartial inquirers after true Religion. The writers I am opposing cannot possibly solve the Difficulty just now put without saying, *upon this one Occasion*, that God will not suffer such a case to happen. All I ask is, that they would be consistent *to the end*, and *always* own, that the same consideration of God's moral Perfections, which leads them to this as a certain conclusion in this *one* case, will oblige them to conclude the same in *all* like cases, *viz.* That God will *never* suffer a false Prophet to work *uncontroul'd* miracles in defense of a false religion, in such circumstances as shall unavoidably lead honest men of the meanest rank into the belief of it. And when they once own this in

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the *general*, they will readily acknowledge in consequence of it, that whenever God permits miracles to be perform'd by a Prophet, *without opposition*, or makes a Prophet *conquer* his opposers, those miracles are *in themselves* full and *demonstrative* proof, that God has chosen and qualified him to teach and direct us in the affairs of Religion ; and that his miracles are an *assurance given us by God*, that he *knows* this Prophet *will not mislead* us, and that we may, and ought to, trust him as an Oracle, and depend upon whatsoever he shall say to us.

In this view the Doctrine of Miracles appears to be, what it's nature and intent necessarily requires it should be, *one of the plainest and easiest Doctrines* in the World. All accounts of miracles that are above the reach of the meanest of the people are either false or impertinent. It is, in the nature of the thing impossible there should be any need even for the greatest Philosophers to debate *any one question* about miracles, which a plain, honest Brickmaker in *Egypt* could not have decided. They may amuse themselves with the idle questions of the School-men, for a little *Diversion* ; but beyond that such questions are not to be carried. It is of no consequence at all to religion, to determine whether the miracles, which were done by *Moses*, *Christ*, and the Apostles, were done by the ministry of *Angels*, or *immediately* by the hand of *God*. The *whole* Nature of the Miracles lay in the doing such things as were *above the powers of*

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Men. If they were not above the powers of Angels, yet still they are infallible Signs of a Prophet, because God would not permit any Angels to set this Divine Seal (as it was granted to *Moses* and *Christ*) to the forged commission of any Impostor. Nor is it of the least consequence to debate a question lately moved, *Whether God can work miracles?* For it would be only a dispute about *words*. All that is intended by saying *he cannot*, is, that *God is almighty*, or *that there is nothing above his Power*: which no one doubts of. And from hence it is certain, that God can do those works of wonder which were above the power of *Moses* or any man, *i. e.* in the *common* sense of words, *God can work miracles.*

F I N I S.



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